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## Retiring CEO of St. Joe's reflects on 28 years at hospital's helm

The only care available for cancer patients in the Lewiston-Clarkston Valley was 15-minute consultations every other week with Boise oncologists who worked from the emergency room when Howard Hayes took the reins of St. Joseph Regional Medical Center.

The physicians had to pack a lot into those short time slots, including chemotherapy. Fast forward 28 years as Hayes prepares for retirement and his last day Jan. 7. A team of five oncologists based in Lewiston now coordinate care that can include diagnosis with CT scans and treatment with radiation.

Improvements in cancer treatment are only part of Hayes' legacy. He has overseen radical changes in health care during his career. Hayes coordinated the medical center's adjustment in which the average hospital stay fell from five to four days with more surgeries done on an outpatient basis. The staff grew from about 500 with total annual compensation of \$7.78 million to 900 with a yearly payroll of \$55.8 million.

Hayes has worked through that evolution while keeping an average profit margin of about 3.5 percent in an era of anemic payments from Medicare and Medicaid at a hospital that has a mandate from the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet not to deny care that's a medical necessity to anyone for financial reasons. "We try to be very strategic in making sure the services we offer are ones we can support clinically and financially within the mission of our hospital," said Hayes, who's developed a reputation for his unconventional style in the position that as of 2009 had a annual compensation package of \$333,458.

He doesn't have a computer on his desk or carry a work cell phone. Secretaries handle his e-mail and he has plenty of staff who pull the data together when he needs a report. If someone in the hospital wants to discuss an issue with him, he handles it face to face.

Hayes has been in meetings with 400 people and watched as people texted, talked and played games on electronic devices. "I'm the only person listening to the speaker," he said.

Hayes' approach has benefited the community, said Mike Day, the retired owner of a wholesale plumbing and industrial supply business who volunteered as a board and foundation member for the hospital for at least 15 years.

It was easier for hospital supporters to raise funds when they knew their money was going to an institution that would spend it wisely, Day said. "St. Joe's prior to (Hayes) coming was in financial trouble."

Hayes was a "tough negotiator," said John Stellmon, who sometimes represented Regence BlueShield of Idaho in talks with the Lewiston hospital. "But he understands the financial and social position the hospital plays in the community," said Stellmon, Regence's senior vice president of health care services in Boise. "He understands the economics of health care and what's best for the community and the region."

The strength of his administration grew from the talented physicians, dentists, sisters, employees, volunteers and community members who all cared as deeply as he did about the hospital's success, Hayes said. "I did a lot of listening, very little talking. That's very key for a new person."

It was his first round of strategic planning that identified the need for upgrades to cancer services. Jim McMonigle, the owner of a Lewiston Chevrolet/Cadillac dealership, was selected as the person to lead a \$1 million fundraising campaign to start a radiation oncology center.

"Jim was Mr. Lewiston," Hayes said. "He was the kind of guy who could walk down the street and collect \$1 million."

McMonigle died unexpectedly and Marv Wittman, a rancher and chairman of the board, stepped in to replace him, and met the goal on schedule.

Cancer treatment wasn't the only area Hayes helped bolster. The emergency room physicians were instrumental in recruiting two neurosurgeons to St. Joe's. Dr. Donald Soloniuk and Dr. William Hill care for patients with brain injuries from vehicle or industrial accidents who previously were flown to Spokane, Hayes said. "It greatly reduced the mortality rate of patients."

Along with the successes, Hayes has had his share of challenges. Three key groups of specialists - orthopedists, gastroenterologists and radiologists - took much of their business elsewhere under his watch. "It's a free market where people are free to pursue their own endeavors," Hayes said. And not all patients have been delighted with the introduction of a hospitalist program. When admitted to St. Joe's or Tri-State Memorial Hospital in Clarkston, a patient's treatment is transferred from their primary care doctor to a specialized physician.

Family practice physicians sought the reform and what patients may not understand is how much it helps them, Hayes said. Patients aren't stuck in the waiting room of their primary care physicians when their doctors are faced with cases that require hospitalization.

Hospital care is more efficient because a physician is available to read test results faster and adjust treatment if necessary. And primary care physicians typically work five to seven years longer before retirement when they're not fatigued by grueling on-call schedules, Hayes said.

Just maintaining what was created in the last 28 years could be a challenge for Hayes' replacement, Tim Sayler, the chief operating officer of Altru Health System in Grand Forks, N.D., who starts on Feb. 15, Hayes said.

Sayler's compensation is still being negotiated, said Doug Barton, a spokesman for St. Joe's. Many of the doctors recruited to the Lewiston-Clarkston Valley during Hayes' era remain, but there are concerns that a nationwide shortage of doctors in almost all specialties will hamper efforts to replace them as they leave or retire.

And health care reform stands only to make it harder for hospitals to get fair reimbursements for their services, Hayes said. "The strengths of the system should be preserved as opposed to creating a huge new bureaucracy."